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# **The Meaning of**

# **THE HOLY QUR'ÁN**

**'ABDULLAH YŪSUF 'ALĪ**

**New Edition with Qur'anic Text (Arabic),  
Revised Translation, Commentary and  
Newly Compiled Comprehensive Index**

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*Al Hamd li Allah* (Praise be to Allah), this Revised Edition is a culmination of experiences in the last two decades in publishing translations of the meaning of the Qur'ān in several languages. With the Grace of Allah, amana publications, a subsidiary of Amana Corporation has succeeded in publishing this great work of the late 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, revised for the first time after his death with the highest standard of scholarship and authenticity that it deserves.

About eight years ago, the work for this edition began when we started the selection of the most recognised and authentic available English translation of the meaning of the Qur'ān. The selection committee, comprised of highly reputable Muslim scholars, decided on the work of 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī and solicited opinions and criticisms from Islamic institutions and scholars around the world. A number of committees reviewed all the responses carefully, examined the text meticulously, updated the material and refined the commentaries. The last complete review was undertaken by the late Ismā'īl Rājī al Fārūqī, who was then President of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in the United States of America.

Guided by its own commitment to serve the Qur'ān, amana publications undertook this tremendous task, and in cooperation with the IIIT completed this honorable work. amana publications and IIIT established an editorial board whose effort was to implement the final recommendations of the committees and to concentrate on the manuscript preparation, overall editorial changes, and revisions in style and format (discussed in the Preface to the Revised Edition). All praise be to Allah for enabling us to serve the Qur'ān by making available this Revised Edition.

We acknowledge with deep appreciation the efforts of IIIT and all those who helped produce this monumental work of 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī. May Allah bless his soul and reward him generously; *wa al Hamd li Allah Rabb al 'Ālamīn* (All Praise and Gratitude is due to Allah, the Lord and Sustainer of the Worlds).

Jumādā al Ākhirah 1409 A.H.  
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# TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC WORDS AND NAMES

THE following table shows the system which I have followed in transliterating the letters of the Arabic alphabet:

ا	= Alif = a	ط	= Tā' = t
آ	= ā (long vowel)	ظ	= Zā' = z
ب	= Bā' = b	ع	= 'Ayn = i (inverted apostrophe)
ت	= Tā' = t	غ	= Ghayn = gh
ث	= Thā' = th	ف	= Fā' = f
ج	= Jīm = j	ق	= Qāf = q
ح	= Hā' = h	ك	= Kāf = k
خ	= Khā' = kh	ل	= Lām = l
د	= Dal = d	م	= Mīm = m
ذ	= Dhāl = dh	ن	= Nūn = n
ر	= Rā' = r	ه	= Hā' = h
ز	= Zāy = z	و	= Wāw = w (consonantal)
س	= Sīn = s		= ū (long vowel)
ش	= Shīn = sh	ي	= Yā' = y (consonantal)
ص	= Ṣād = s		= ī (long vowel)
ض	= Dād = d	ء	= Hamzah = ' (apostrophe)

Short vowels: — (fatḥah) = a  
— (kasrah) = i  
— (ḍammah) = u

1. In internationalised words and names I have used the spelling ordinarily current in English; e.g., Mawḥvi, Urdu, Islam, Israel, Abraham, Jacoh. Here the boundary is thin and rather ill-defined, and possibly my practice and that of my proofreaders, have not been absolutely uniform.

2. Some names, e.g., Ishmael, Hagar, etc., have acquired a contemptuous association in their European forms, while the persons they represent are sacred personages held in great honour in Islam. I have, therefore, avoided the European forms and used the Arabic forms, Ismā'il, Hājar, etc.

# ABBREVIATIONS USED

I have not used many abbreviations. Those I have used are shown below:

A.C.	= After Christ = year of the Christian Calendar.
B.C.	= Before Christ = year of Christian Calendar.
A.H.	= After Hijrah = Year of the Islamic Calendar.
Bk.	= Book.
C.	= The running Commentary, in rhythmic prose.
Cf.	= compare.
d.	= date of death of an author (to show the age in which he lived).
Deut.	= The Book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament.
E. B.	= <i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i> , 14th edition.
e.g.	= <i>exempli gratia</i> = for example.
Exod.	= The Book of Exodus, Old Testament.
Gen.	= The Book of Genesis, Old Testament.
H.G.S.	= Hāfiz Ghulām Sarwar's Translation of the Qur'ān.
i.e.	= <i>id est</i> = that is.
Josh.	= Book of Joshua, Old Testament.
Matt.	= Gospel of St. Matthew, New Testament.
M.M.A.	= Mawḥvi Muḥammad 'Alī's translation of the Qur'ān.
M.P.	= Mr. M. Pickthall's <i>The Meaning of the Glorious Koran</i> .
n.	= note.
nn.	= notes.
Num.	= The Book of Numbers, Old Testament.
p.	= page.
pp.	= pages.
Q.	= Qur'ān.
20:25	= Qur'ān, Sūrah 20, Ayah 25.
Rev.	= Revelation of St. John, New Testament.
re	= reference.
S.	= Sūrah.
v.	= verse.
vv.	= verses.
viz.	= <i>videlicet</i> = namely.
[Eds.]	= Editors.
(R)	= Revised by Editors.

## Sūrah 1.

*Al Fātiḥah* (The Opening)<sup>18</sup>

1. In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.<sup>19</sup>
2. Praise be to Allah, The Cherisher and Sustainer<sup>20</sup> of the Worlds;
3. Most Gracious, Most Merciful;
4. Master of the Day of Judgement.
5. Thee do we worship,<sup>21</sup> And Thine aid we seek.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

18. By universal consent it is rightly placed at the beginning of the Qur'an, as summing up, in marvellously terse and comprehensive words, man's relation to Allah in contemplation and prayer. In our spiritual contemplation the first words should be those of praise. If the praise is from our inmost being, it brings us into union with Allah's Will. Then our eyes see all good, peace, and harmony. Evil, rebellion, and conflict are purged out. They do not exist for us, for our eyes are lifted up above them in praise. Then we see Allah's attributes better (verses 2-4). This leads us to the attitude of worship and acknowledgment (verse 5). And finally comes prayer for guidance, and a contemplation of what guidance means (verses 6-7).

Allah needs no praise, for He is above all praise; He needs no petition, for He knows our needs better than we do ourselves, and His boundaries are open without asking, to the righteous and the sinner alike. The prayer is for our own spiritual education, consolation, and confirmation.

That is why the words in this Sūrah are given to us in the form in which we should utter them. When we reach enlightenment, they flow spontaneously from us.

19. The Arabic words "*Rahmān* and *Rahīm*," translated "Most Gracious" and "Most Merciful" are both intensive forms referring to different aspects of Allah's attribute of Mercy. The Arabic intensive is more suited to express Allah's attributes than the superlative degree in English. The latter implies a comparison with other beings, or with other times or places, while there is no being like unto Allah, and He is independent of Time and Place. Mercy may imply pity, long-suffering, patience, and forgiveness, all of which the sinner needs and Allah Most Merciful bestows in abundant measure. But there is a Mercy that goes before even the need arises, the Grace which is ever watchful, and flows from Allah Most Gracious to all His creatures, protecting them, preserving them, guiding them, and leading them to clearer light and higher life. For this reason the attribute *Rahmān* (Most Gracious) is not applied to any but Allah, but the attribute *Rahīm* (Merciful), is a general term, and may also be applied to Men. To make us contemplate these boundless gifts of Allah, the formula: "In the name of Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful"; is placed before every Sūrah of the Qur'an (except the ninth), and repeated at the beginning of every act by the Muslim who dedicates his life to Allah, and whose hope is in His Mercy.

Opinion is divided whether the *Bismillah* should be numbered as a separate verse or not. It is unanimously agreed that it is a part of the Qur'an. Therefore it is better to give it an independent number in the first Sūrah. For subsequent Sūrahs it is treated as an introduction or headline, and therefore not numbered.

20. The Arabic word *Rabb*, usually translated Lord, has also the meaning of cherishing, sustaining, bringing to maturity. Allah cares for all the worlds He has created (see n. 1787 and n. 4355).

There are many worlds—astronomical and physical worlds, worlds of thought, spiritual world, and so on. In every one of them, Allah is all-in-all. We express only one aspect of it when we say: "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." The mystical division between (1) *Nāsūt*, the human world knowable by the senses, (2) *Malakūt*, the invisible world of angels, and (3) *Lahūt*, the divine world of Reality, requires a whole volume to explain it.

21. On realizing in our souls Allah's love and care, His grace and mercy, and His power and justice (as Ruler of the Day of Judgement), the immediate result is that we bend in the act of worship, and see both our shortcomings and His all-sufficient power. The emphatic form means that not only do we reach the position of worshipping Allah and asking for His help, but we worship Him alone and ask for His aid only. For there is none other than He worthy of our devotion and able to help us. Then plural "we" indicates that we associate ourselves with all who seek Allah, thus strengthening ourselves and strengthening them in a fellowship of faith (see n. 586).

6. Show<sup>22</sup> us the straight way,

7. The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, Those whose (portion) Is not wrath,<sup>23</sup> And who go not astray.<sup>24</sup>

أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

22. If we translate by the English word "guide," we shall have to say: "Guide us to and in the straight Way." For we may be wandering aimlessly, and the first step is to find the Way; and the second need is to keep in the Way. Our own wisdom may fail in either case. The straight Way is often the narrow Way, or the steep Way, which many people shun (90:11). By the world's perversity the straight Way is sometimes stigmatized and the crooked Way praised. How are we to judge? We must ask for Allah's guidance. With a little spiritual insight we shall see which are the people who walk in the light of Allah's grace, and which are those that walk in the darkness of Wrath. This also would help our judgement.

23. Note that the words relating to Grace are connected actively with Allah; those relating to Wrath are impersonal. In the one case Allah's Mercy encompasses us beyond our deserts. In the other case our own actions are responsible for the Wrath—the negative of Grace, Peace, or Harmony.

24. Are there two categories?—those who are in the darkness of Wrath and those who stray? The first are those who deliberately break Allah's law; the second those who stray out of carelessness or negligence. Both are responsible for their own acts or omissions. In opposition to both are the people who are in the light of Allah's Grace: for His Grace not only protects them from active wrong (if they will only submit their will to Him) but also from straying into paths of temptation or carelessness. The negative *ghayr* should be construed as applying not to the way, but as describing men protected from two dangers by Allah's Grace.



## INTRODUCTION TO SŪRAH 2—AL BAQARAH

As the Opening Sūrah sums up in seven beautiful verses the essence of the Qur'an, so this Sūrah sums up in 286 verses the whole teaching of the Qur'an. It is a closely reasoned argument.

**Summary**—It begins (verses 1-29) by classifying men into three broad categories, depending on how they receive Allah's message.

This leads to the story of the creation of man, the high destiny intended for him, his fall, and the hope held out to him (2:30-39).

Israel's story is then told according to their own records and traditions—what privileges they received and how they abused them (2:40-86), thus illustrating again as by a parable the general story of man.

In particular, reference is made to Moses and Jesus and their struggles with an unruly people: how people of the Book played false their own lights and in their pride rejected Muḥammad, who came in the true line of Prophets (2:87-121). (R).

They falsely laid claim to the virtues of Father Abraham: he was indeed a righteous Imām, but he was the progenitor of Ismā'il's line (Arabs) as well as of Israel's line, and he with Ismā'il built the Ka'bah (the House of Allah in Makkah) and purified it, thus establishing a common religion, of which Islam is the universal exponent (2:122-141). (R).

The Ka'bah was now to be the center of universal worship and the symbol of Islamic unity (2:142-167).

The Islamic *Ummah* (brotherhood) having thus been established with its definite centre and symbol, ordinances are laid down for the social life of the community, with the proviso (2:177) that righteousness does not consist in formalities, but in faith, kindness, prayer, charity, probity, and patience under suffering. The ordinances relate to food and drink, bequests, fasts, jihād, wine and gambling, treatment of orphans and women, etc. (2:168-242).

Lest the subject of jihād should be misunderstood, it is taken up again in the story of Saul, Goliath and David, in contrast to the story of Jesus (2:243-253).

And so the lesson is enforced that true virtue lies in practical deeds of manliness, kindness, and good faith (2:254-283), and Allah's nature<sup>24-A</sup> is called to mind in the sublime *Āyat al Kursī*, the Verse of the Throne (2:255).

The Sūrah ends with an exhortation to Faith, Obedience, a sense of Personal Responsibility, and Prayer (2:284-286).

This is the longest Sūrah of the Qur'an, and in it occurs the longest verse (2:282). The name of the Sūrah is from the Parable of the Heifer in 2:67-71, which illustrates the insufficiency of carping obedience. When faith is lost, people put off obedience with various excuses: even when at last they obey in the letter, they fail in the spirit, which means that they get fossilised, and their self-sufficiency prevents them from seeing that spiritually they are not alive but dead. For life is movement, activity, striving, fighting against baser things. And this is the burden of the Sūrah.

This is in the main an early Madīnah.

C. 44.—The Message of Allah, is a guide that is sure  
(2:1-29.) To those who seek His light. But those  
Who reject faith are blind; their hearts  
Are sealed. Woe to the hypocrites,  
Self-deceived and deceiving others,  
With mockery on their lips, and mischief  
In their hearts, and fear; the clouds  
That bring fertilizing rain to others,  
To them bring but deafening thunder-peals  
And lightning flashes blinding to their eyes.

24-A. By the expression "Allah's nature" the author means Allah's attributes. [Eds.].

## Sūrah 2.

## Al Baqarah (The Heifer)

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,  
Most Merciful.

1. Alif Lām Mīm.<sup>25</sup>

2. This is the Book;  
In it is guidance sure, without  
doubt,  
To those who fear<sup>26</sup> Allah;

3. Who believe in the Unseen,  
Are steadfast in prayer,  
And spend out of what We  
Have provided for them;<sup>27</sup>

4. And who believe in the  
Revelation  
Sent to thee,  
And sent before thy time,  
And (in their hearts)  
Have the assurance of the  
Hereafter.<sup>28</sup>

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلِفْ لَامْ مِيمٌ

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ

هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ

وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ

وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ

وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ

25. These are abbreviated letters, the *Muqatta'at*, on which a general discussion will be found in Appendix I (at the end of this Sūrah).

The particular letters, *Alif*, *Lām*, *Mīm*, are found prefixed to this Sūrah, and Sūrahs 3, 29, 30, 31 and 32 (six in all). In 2 and 3 the argument is about the rise and fall of nations, their past, and their future in history, with ordinances for the new universal people of Islam. In 29 a similar argument about nations leads off to the mystery of Life and Death, Failure and Triumph, Past and Future, in the history of individual souls. The burden of 30 is that Allah is the source of all things and all things return to Him. In 31 and 32 the same lesson is enforced: Allah is the Creator and He will be the Judge on the Last Day. There is therefore a common thread, the mystery of Life and Death, Beginning and End.

Much has been written about the meaning of these letters, but most of it is pure conjecture. Some commentators are content to recognize them as some mystic symbols of which it is unprofitable to discuss the meaning by more verbal logic. (R).

26. *Taqwā*, and the verbs and nouns connected with the root, signify: (1) the fear of Allah, which, according to the writer of Proverbs 1:7 in the Old Testament, is the beginning of Wisdom; (2) restraint, or guarding one's tongue, hand, and hear from evil; (3) hence righteousness, piety, good conduct. All these ideas are implied: in the translation, only one or other of these ideas can be indicated, according to the context. See also 47:17; and 74:56, n. 5808.

27. All bounties proceed from Allah. They may be physical gifts, e.g. food, clothing, houses, gardens, wealth, etc. or intangible gifts, e.g., influence, power, birth and the opportunities flowing from it, health, talents, etc. or spiritual gifts, e.g., insight into good and evil, understanding of men, the capacity for love, etc. We are to use all in humility and moderation. But we are also to give out of every one of them something that contributes to the well-being of others. We are to be neither ascetics nor luxurious sybarites, neither selfish misers nor thoughtless prodigals.

28. Righteousness comes from a secure faith, from sincere devotion to Allah, and from unselfish service to Man.

5. They are on (true guidance),  
From their Lord, and it is  
These who will prosper.<sup>29</sup>

6. As to those who reject Faith,<sup>30</sup>  
It is the same to them  
Whether thou warn them  
Or do not warn them;  
They will not believe.

7. Allah hath set a seal<sup>31</sup>  
On their hearts and on their  
hearing,  
And on their eyes is a veil;  
Great is the penalty they  
(incur).<sup>32</sup>

## SECTION 2.

8. Of the people there are some  
who say:<sup>33</sup>  
"We believe in Allah and the Last  
day;"  
But they do not (really) believe.

9. Fain would they deceive  
Allah and those who believe,  
But they only deceive themselves,  
And realize (it) not!

10. In their hearts is a disease;

٥ أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ  
وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

٦ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ  
أَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

٧ خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ  
وَعَلَىٰ أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ  
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

٨ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ  
وَبِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَمَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

٩ يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا  
وَمَا يَخْدَعُونَ إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ

١٠ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ

29. Prosperity must be taken as referring to all the kinds of bounty which we discussed in the note to 2:3 above. The right use of one kind leads to an increase in that and other kinds, and that is prosperity.

30. *Kafara*, *kufr*, *kafr*, and derivative forms of the word, imply a deliberate rejection of Faith as opposed to a mistaken idea of Allah or faith, which is not inconsistent with an earnest desire to see the truth. Where there is such desire, the Grace and Mercy of Allah gives guidance. But that guidance is not efficacious when it is deliberately rejected, and the possibility of rejection follows from the grant of free will. The consequence of the rejection is that the spiritual faculties become dead or impervious to better influences. See also n.93, n.3557, and n.3644.

31. All actions are referred to Allah. Therefore when we get the penalty of our deliberate sin, and our senses become impervious to good, the penalty is referred to the justice of Allah (Cf. n.1460, n.2146, and n.3577).

32. The penalty here is the opposite of the prosperity referred to in 2:5. As we go down the path of sin, our penalty gathers momentum, just as goodness brings its own capacity for greater goodness.

33. We now come to a third class of people, the hypocrites. They are untrue to themselves, and therefore their hearts are diseased (2:10). The disease tends to spread, like all evil. They are curable but if they harden their hearts, they soon pass into the category of those who deliberately reject light.

And Allah has increased their  
disease:<sup>34</sup>  
And grievous is the penalty they  
(incur),

Because they are false  
(to themselves).

11. When it is said to them:  
"Make not mischief on the earth,"  
They say: "Why, we only  
Want to make peace!"

12. Of a surety, they are the ones  
Who make mischief,  
But they realize (it) not.<sup>35</sup>

13. When it is said to them:  
"Believe as the others believe,"  
They say: "Shall we believe  
As the fools believe?"—  
Nay, of a surety they are the  
fools,

But they do not know.<sup>36</sup>

14. When they meet those who  
believe,<sup>37</sup>  
They say: "We believe;"  
But when they are alone  
With their evil ones,  
They say: "We are really with you  
We (were) only jesting."

15. Allah will throw back  
Their mockery on them,  
And give them rope in  
their trespasses;  
So they will wander like blind  
ones (to and fro).

16. These are they who have  
bartered  
Guidance for error:

فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا  
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ

١١ وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ  
قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ

١٢ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ  
وَلَكِن لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ

١٣ وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا كَمَا ءَامَنَ النَّاسُ  
قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا ءَامَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ  
أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ وَلَكِن لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ

١٤ وَإِذَا قَالُوا لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا  
وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شَيَاطِينِهِمْ قَالُوا إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ  
إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِءُونَ

١٥ اللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ  
وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

١٦ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرَوُا  
الضَّلَالَةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ

34. The insincere man who thinks he can get the best of both worlds by compromising with good and evil only increases the disease of his heart, because he is not true to himself. (Cf. n.552). Even the good which comes to him he can pervert to evil. So the rain which fills out the ear of corn or lends fragrance to the rose also lends strength to the thorn or adds strength to the poison of the deadly nightshade. (Cf. 9:125 and n.1376).

35. Much mischief is caused (sometimes unwittingly) by people who think that they have a mission of peace, when they have not even a true perception of right and wrong. By their blind arrogance they depress the good and encourage the evil.

36. This is another phase of the hypocrite and the cynic. "Faith," he says, "is good enough to fools." But his cynicism may be the greatest folly in the eyes of Allah.

37. A deeper phase of insincerity is actual duplicity. But it never pays in the end. If we compare such a man to a trader, he loses in the bargain.

But their traffic is profitless,  
And they have lost true direction.

17. Their similitude is that of a man<sup>38</sup>  
Who kindled a fire;  
When it lighted all around him,  
Allah took away their light  
And left them in utter darkness.  
So they could not see.
18. Deaf, dumb, and blind,  
They will not return (to the path).
19. Or (another similitude)<sup>39</sup>  
Is that of a rain-laden cloud  
From the sky: in it are zones  
Of darkness, and thunder and lightning:  
They press their fingers in their ears  
To keep out the stunning thunderclap,  
The while they are in terror of death.  
But Allah is ever round  
The rejecters of Faith!
20. The lightning all but snatches away  
Their sight; every time the light  
(Helps) them, they walk therein,  
And when the darkness grows on them,  
They stand still,  
And if Allah willed, He could take away  
Their faculty of hearing and seeing;  
For Allah hath power over all things.

فَمَا رِيحَتْ يَجْرَثُ لَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ

١٧ مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا  
فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ  
وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يَبْصُرُونَ

١٨ صُمُّ بَكْمٌ عُيٌّ فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ

١٩ أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ  
فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَنُورٌ  
يَجْعَلُونَ أَصْبِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ  
مِنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ  
وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ

٢٠ يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطِفُ أَبْصَرَهُمْ  
كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ مَشَوْا فِيهِ  
وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا  
وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ  
لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَرِهِمْ  
إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

38. The man wanted light; he only kindled a fire. It produced a blaze, and won the applause of all around. But it did not last long. When the flame went out as was inevitable, the darkness was worse than before. And they all lost their way. So hypocrisy, deception, arrogant compromise with evil, cynicism, or duplicity may win temporary applause. But the true light of faith and sincerity is wanting, and therefore it must mislead and ruin all concerned. In the consternation they cannot speak or hear each other, and of course they cannot see; so they end like the deliberate rejecters of Faith (2:7), wildly groping about, dumb, deaf and blind. (Cf. n.1153).

39. A wonderfully graphic and powerful simile applying to those who reject Faith. In their self-sufficiency they are undisturbed normally. But what happens when a great storm breaks over them? They cover their ears against thunder-claps, and the lightning nearly blinds them. They are in mortal fear, but Allah encompasses them around—even them, for He at all times encompasses all. He gives them rope. In the intervals of deafening noise and blinding flashes, there are moments of steady light, and these creatures take advantage of them, but again they are plunged into darkness. Perhaps they curse; perhaps they think that the few moments of effective light are due to their own intelligence! How much wiser would they be if they humbled themselves and sought the light of Allah!

## SECTION 3.

21. O ye people!  
Adore your Guardian Lord,  
Who created you  
And those who came before you,  
That ye may become righteous.<sup>40</sup>
22. Who has made the earth your couch  
And the heavens your canopy;  
And sent down rain from the heavens;  
And brought forth therewith  
Fruits for your sustenance;  
Then set not up rivals<sup>41</sup> unto Allah  
When ye know (the truth).
23. And if ye are in doubt  
As to what We have revealed  
From time to time to Our servant,  
Then produce a Sūrah  
Like thereunto;  
And call your witnesses or helpers  
(If there are any) besides Allah,  
If your (doubts) are true.<sup>42</sup>
24. But if ye cannot—  
And of a surety ye cannot—  
Then fear the Fire  
Whose fuel is Men and Stones—

٢١ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ  
الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ  
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

٢٢ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا  
وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً  
فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ  
فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا  
وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

٢٣ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَى عَبْدِنَا  
فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ  
وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ  
إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

٢٤ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا  
فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ

40. For *Taqwa* see 2:2, n. 26. I connect this dependent clause with "adore, etc." above, though it could be connected with "created." According to my construction the argument will be as follows. Adoration is the act of the highest and humblest reverence and worship. When you get into that relationship with Allah, Who is your Creator and Guardian, your faith produces works of righteousness. It is a chance given you: will you exercise your free will and take it? If you do, your whole nature will be transformed.

41. Further proofs of Allah's goodness to you are given in this verse. Your whole life, physical and spiritual, depends upon Him. The spiritual is figured by the Canopy of Heaven. The truth has been brought plainly before you. Will you still resist it and go after false gods, the creation of your own fancy? The false gods may be idols, superstitions, self, or even great or glorious things like Poetry, Art, or Science, when set up as rivals to Allah. They may be pride of race, pride of birth, pride of wealth or position, pride of power, pride of learning, or even spiritual pride.

42. How do we know that there is revelation, and that it is from Allah? Here is a concrete test. The Teacher of Allah's Truth has placed before you many Sūrahs. Can you produce one like it? If there is any one besides Allah, who can inspire spiritual truth in such noble language, produce your evidence. Or is it that your doubts are merely argumentative, refractory, against your own inner light, or conscience? All true revelation is itself a miracle, and stands on its own merits. (Cf. 10:38; 11:13).